

## STOPPING A CONGO CANNIBAL FEAST

**THE** Adventures in the African Forest Wherein a Young and Courageous American Is Rescued Just as He Is About To Be Killed and Eaten by Savages.

THE writer of this adventure is famous in both hemispheres for his deeds of daring. He was concerned in two or three fiery escapades in Europe before he was more than a boy, and when he was little more than twenty he enlisted among the mixed officers who as soldiers of fortune were willing to risk their lives to help King Leopold govern the Belgian Congo.

His military training, his accuracy as a shot and his lionine courage soon won for him high recognition, and he was made chief of police on the Congo, with a command of Hussars, imported Arabian fighting men and blacks from the Portuguese possessions noted for their courage and soldierly qualities. For several years he ruled with an iron hand, then resigned to seek other adventures.

The young American whom D'Almonte and his party rescued from the cannibals is John Harris Walton, still living in San Paolo di Loando, serving as manager of the Hatton & Cookson Company concessions.

By Baron Antonio Benedetti D'Almonte  
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THE affair I am about to detail occurred in the middle of February, 1903, and since it deals with cannibals and there is quite a bit of dispute among armchair authorities on the state of African cannibalism it seems wise to me to relate a few of the facts concerning cannibalism, as I have observed it.

My first experience with cannibals came soon after my taking up constabulary work. I had left Boma on a tribal pacificatory mission some weeks before, and, with a company of twenty native policemen and sixty porters, was making an overland journey between two of the upper tributaries.

One of my porters had cut his foot on some sharp bit of something, and in his efforts to carry his load and keep pace with the others had got himself into a dreadful state before I was aware that he was incapacitated. When I knew it I at once detailed two of my men to divide his load, carry his arms and help him. If he got so badly off that he could not travel they were instructed to remain with him in camp until he could follow after us. We had planned to camp for some days as soon as we reached water.

The second day thereafter I noticed the men I had detailed in their places, but the cripple was not to be seen.

"Where is Unshana?" I asked.

"Oh, master, his illness overcame him last evening and he died. We buried him by the dry river and came on," was the answer.

Some weeks later a report reached me from headquarters in which a missionary charged that he had found evidence of men attached to my party having killed and eaten one of their own number. I sent for the two I had detailed to care for the man with the hurt foot and told them that the devils had told me the whole story. In fact, I reconstructed the picture very vividly for the precious pair, ending by demanding why they had killed and eaten their comrade, Unshana.

"He could go no more and we could not carry him. Only his leg was bad, and why should so much good meat go to waste?"

The punishment for cannibalism being death, I had the two of them shot at once.

#### The Captive Americans.

I was in command of a small party in the month of the year which I have mentioned and we were encamped on a well protected island of the great river when we heard shouts from the north bank and I saw three white men, in one of whom I recognized a very famous character of the Congo. He had appeared about ten years before without telling any one of his previous life or the cause of his hiding away in the jungle and had entered on the life of a hunter and trader, spending all of his time with the blacks. He was known among white men as Nemo and among the blacks as Undele. The two men with him I did not know. Sending my pirogue with its crew of rowers I soon had them in camp.

I did not speak English at that time, but Undele very quickly told me the story in the native tongue. He had been employed to guide the two Americans and a third friend. As nearly as I remember the details the third man, John Harris Walton by name, blacks and had doubtless been killed and perhaps eaten. The natives employed by the party had fled, leaving Undele and the two other Americans to make their way down river to civilization as best they could. The affair had happened only a few hours before and it was sheer good fortune that they had encountered my police party.

As nearly as Undele and I could determine, the attack on Walton had been made by a detachment from the vagrant tribe of a chief named Ugnodo Sumbah, who wandered here and there with about one hundred followers, all that was left to him of a large force which we had nearly wiped out five years before. Walton had been at some distance from camp when it happened, and when the camp blacks deserted it had been plain that pursuit without a stronger force was useless. In that remote section Ugnodo and his men would not trouble to travel far with their prisoners and the stores they had stolen, and if we were careful we might steal up on them that night and punish them.

As quickly as I could organize a guard for my camp and detail a punitive force to the pirogue we set off. The twenty rowers placed us just before sunset at the spot where the attack had occurred. There we found several of the blacks who had deserted. They had come back after their panic and were in a very despondent, hopeless state, waiting in camp for something to happen. They were agreed that the raiders were the men of Ugnodo Sumbah and that the party of twenty or more had recrossed the river and gone up one of the tributaries. According to their reports the raiders were able warriors and well armed.

It was a desperate chance to take, but I decided to go in pursuit at once and practically yielded the command to Undele, whose familiarity with the natives and with every little bit of African woodcraft made him a man to be respected in a hunt like this.

Rowing way in the pirogue was made absolutely clear so that the big fellows could get a full, long stroke. Squatted on the bow was Undele, in his jungle worn hunting suit, a great soft hat crowded down over his ears and his black beard flowing back over his shoulders as the pirogue shot into the wild.



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close at hand. The rowers were commanded by a huge Musorongo, who stood at his full height and directed the course of the craft at times by the inclination of his body and again by queer hissing commands to the men.

It was as stirring a picture as one could wish to see as we moved across the turbid river, first in the slanting rays of the red declining sun and then in the black shadows of the intervening trees. It was quite dark before we had fairly entered the tributary we were to ascend.

#### Through the Jungle.

In an hour we were moving in the heart of the tropical night, with only the sounds of nature about us. At times there would be a splash and a great puffing hiss near us as some hippopotamus, disturbed by our sweeps, would sink to safety. High up on the rocks we could hear a hunting leopard's yawning cry, answered by a chorus of lions roaring on the other bank, where they had come down to drink. And again there would sound from the forest heavy crashes that meant some heavy beast was astride there.

For long spaces of time there would be no sound from the animals, but there was never complete stillness because of the vast numbers of birds of all sizes in the riverside jungle. If one lost his perch and tried to regain it he would disturb a thousand others that flitted or dropped hither and thither through the thick dark.

There is no sound unless it be the report of a heavy gun that will carry so far in the African night as the noise of one or more of the big drums of which the natives are so fond. A section of a hollow tree, whittled to a thin shell and highly seasoned and polished, will make a bell-like sound if struck, even when it has no drumhead on it, but cover one or both ends with taut tanned skins and beat them with a flat wooden paddle and the sound could be heard for ten miles.

It must have been near midnight, judging from the light of the rising moon beginning to show in the east, when Undele gave a sharp, clicking hiss, and the chief of rowers answered it. We had been sweeping up the river at high speed, dark as it was, all the time in danger of being precipitated into water that is never safe for swimming thanks to its treacherous character and its various dangerous inhabitants, and we went on for fully another half hour before that hiss sounded once more from the bow, and this time I knew what it meant. From somewhere ahead of us came the steady throb of the drums of Ugnodo Sumbah's band in camp—either the party we sought or another holding a celebration. Undele, with his trained white man's ears, and the standing black, whose ears needed no training, had heard that drum music long before it had reached our

double rowers.

Now we swung in close to shore to get in the shadow of the overhanging trees, as the stage of the river was high, and in a few minutes crept around a bend and could see on the beach about two miles away several huge fires. As we drew nearer it was possible to make out black figures dancing, leaping and running in and out among them. When we had come as near as we could without danger of being seen we began to hug the shore very closely and at last disembarked. The party that went ashore consisted of four white men and five black policemen armed with the best rifles.

Carefully we crept through the bushes until we came to the edges of the forest nearest the fire, and there a terrible sight met our eyes. The cannibalistic ceremony was in full progress. About one hundred blacks were in the open space and it was very easy to make out the grim figure of old Ugnodo Sumbah.

#### Near to His Death.

Stripped and tied to a stake was young Harris. He was still alive, for we saw him turn his head and there was a certain defiance in his attitude that sent a thrill through every white man there. He was facing death as a white man should. The men dancing about him had picked him in a score of places with their weapons, and even as we watched one dashed forward and made a fresh wound in the arm with the point of an assegai. One of Harris' friends raised his rifle and would have fired if Undele had not repressed him, and signed to us to remain where we were. Gathering himself like a runner starting from a mark he dashed full into the circle of demons drunk with palm wine and hemp smoke, hurling them right and left with his mighty arms, and, facing the old chief, addressed him in the native tongue.

"Ugnodo Sumbah, is this the way you would treat a friend of Undele? Have you forgotten that you and I have exchanged blood and are blood brothers. You have sworn safety to all that I have held safe. Perjured! Dog of a liar! Why did you do this?"

All the blacks knew the old man. His spectacular appearance had startled them and they had stopped the dance at once, but they stood glaring angrily at him, with weapons ready for instant use. Crouched in the long grass, we held our rifles ready for the crisis.

Ugnodo Sumbah advanced with great dignity and he was certainly barbarously impressive.

"This man you call friend would not give food to my children when they were hungry, and when they took it he killed one of them. There stands the father of the dead man to bear me witness. They seized him and brought him to me. We will punish him and then we will eat him. You have spoken true when you said you were my blood brother, but now you must go. You must go!"

"No, I will not go. Cut him loose at once!"

The old chief grew very angry now and picked his

#### "Now pandemonium came."

voice till it had the precise sound of the roar of a maddened beast.

"Go! Go! Undele, or I will kill you too!"

Undele threw his rifle half up, pressing the muzzle of it against the black chieftain's chest, and pulled the trigger. The body was literally hurled back from the weapon as he fell dead.

Now pandemonium came. Undele emptied his magazine into the crowd that rushed him and then whipped out his Luger and put its nine bullets into the bunch of them. We were a little hindered in our fire by the fact that both Harris at the stake and Undele fighting for his life were in the line of our bullets. The roaring volley from our guns, however, caused a diversion. The blacks split into two parties. Quite a number fled toward the river and the others, rushing between Undele and the stake to which Harris was tied, forced the hunter back several paces, seeking to get inside the guard of his clubbed rifle, with which he was laying about him right and left.

We were so heavily outnumbered that it was hardly the part of wisdom to disclose our numbers as long as we were firing effectively from our cover and the guns sounded like several times their number. Something had to be done at once, however, as the men who had fled toward the river had turned and one of them was rushing on Harris with an uplifted spear. I dropped him as he ran and dashed into the open, drawing my hunting knife.

I had reached the stake and had been able to cut Harris partly free when attacked by three men from behind. Parrying the blow of one's club, I ripped the fellow from his waist line down into his hip with my knife and sprang out of the way of another's spear thrust. One of my Soudanese came running to my rescue and we got Harris loose. There were some big stones at the river brink, and we literally dragged the weakened man in among those and dropped down there under their scanty cover.

My rifle had become jammed and I began work with my pistol on the blacks who had fled toward the river and were now returning slowly to attack us, thinking that we were no more than three or four in number. Undele was having the fight of his life and was contriving to retreat on my men in the grass. Once he was under cover of their rifles he had a chance to reload, and then came a little lull in the fighting.

#### Outguessing the Blacks.

It was a very peculiar military situation. Our party was now divided. Harris and I had burrowed down among the big rocks on the beach and the others were in the long grass on the other side of the beach, with the bulk of the enemy working around behind them in the jungle, and those who had dashed for the river were hidden in the water, all but their heads, which it took sharp eyes to perceive in the blinding glare of the fires.

If I had been able to summon my pirogue from its hiding place down stream we could have effected a retreat, but now we must rejoin and fight our way back toward the boat. I had learned long since that a native travelling on a parallel path with a white man through the brush will outdistance the white man quickly. Also it would be difficult for us to keep together and make speed. Altogether even though we had indicted a terrific loss on the band we were still in danger of losing our own lives.

I shouted to Undele to make him understand that I thought the proper manoeuvre should be, but he seemed to be crazed with the fighting instinct and paid no heed to me. Gradually the warriors in the water behind us disappeared and I had long since ceased trying trap shots at the tops of their heads. I now saw that they were moving either up or down stream and when out of sight in the darkness were crossing the beach. That meant that we were not only divided, but encircled on the landward side as well.

Undele must have seen that in a little while the black devils would have wormed their way so near in the long grass that sheltered him and the men with him that a sudden rush would cost two or three

him they came scampering across the beach, spears and arrows falling around them. One of my policemen was pinned neatly with a slender horn spear, the impact when it struck his thigh throwing him head long in a sort of side somersault. Undele picked him up and brought him into cover.

Our position was temporarily improved, inasmuch

of them their lives. There was sufficient shelter among the rocks for all of them, so at a signal from as the enemy had a long range for their weapons if using them from cover and if they rushed us they must come across the open beach. The fires were dying down and the moonlight beginning to assert itself. We might remain until daylight, but our situation under the sun among rocks still warm from the previous day's heat would be frightful.

Undele had busied himself with some queer preparations since he had got among the rocks and I could not see what he was doing and little guessed that a further surprise in African wood lore awaited me.

Suddenly he leaped from his shelter and ran to where one of the deserted drums lay, caught it up and hurried back, with a hail of missiles about him.

Setting the drum against the rock and bracing it with his knee as he crouched, he began beating it first with his clenched fist and then with the spear drawn from my unfortunate man. The result was a sort of set of signals, very simple, but plainly signals.

"What is that for?" I asked.

"I am sure your head boatman will understand them if he is a good Musorongo. We must be getting out of this hole."

The enemy evidently guessed the meaning of the sounds, for the attack was resumed with great ferocity and it looked as if we were going to be rushed. Ammunition was running low. I was all out and began using the wounded policeman's rifle.

Almost immediately that Undele had concluded there came a far, faint cry from directly behind us on the river, and in a few minutes we could see a pirogue approaching. Undele called out and my head boatman answered. He had wisely disobeyed my orders about remaining at the landing point, and, seeing the light long sustained, had gone out into the stream and held the boat at a point in the darkness from which he could watch our manoeuvres without being seen. Like some great black waterbird the craft came sweeping in, and just as it touched the enemy poured out of the long grass and came leaping and yelling across the beach. Literally pitching Harris and the wounded policeman in, we got aboard, Undele, one of the white men and myself covering the retreat. The last minute of it was hard to hand in desperate fashion, but we got away from shore, and though the maddened wretches followed us until they were up to their armpits in water we were soon out of range and on our way down river. I am glad to say that Harris recovered fully from the effects of his frightful experience, but no man in all the Congo is any sterner in his repression of cannibalism than the man who was so nearly eaten.

#### PICTURES WITH THE TIPPING HABIT.

MRS. BURTON called to her husband shrilly. "Abner," she said, "come and look at the pictures."

"Well," said he, with an inquiring glance about the walls, "what's the matter with them?"

"They're crooked."

"I suppose," suggested Abner, "that you want me to straighten them."

"Well, since you are here you may as well. But that wasn't what I called you for. I wanted to see if you could tell what makes them get out of gear every day. They've been acting so ever since we moved into this flat. Every day, just as regularly as the morning comes, I go through the house and tilt them back to the proper angle, but just that surely do I find them crooked again the next morning. And the funny part of it is they always lean in the same direction. I think it very strange. They didn't do that in the old flat."

"M-m-m-m," said Abner thoughtfully. Mrs. Burton colored her voice with dramatic intonation. "I never liked to say anything about it before," she said, "but I have thought it all along. It is my belief that the house is haunted."

"Oh, good Lord!" ejaculated Burton incredulously. "Well, if it isn't ghosts, what is it?" she asked triumphantly.

"I'll give it up," said Burton.

Although the Burtons had to give up trying to find a cause for the crooked pictures, the pictures themselves did not give up going on a spree. Every morning those hanging on the east and west walls were found tipped to the south, while those on the north and south walls were tipped to the east. Finally Burton himself began to find the nocturnal jamborees of the pictures trying to his nerves, and he spoke to the landlord about it.

"My wife believes," he said, "with true Adamite generosity, 'that the place is haunted.'"

"Nonsense," said the landlord. "Anybody who knows anything about houses and pictures knows there are some places where the pictures couldn't be hired to hang straight and that when they do have the tipping habit they invariably tip in the same direction. Everybody knows that, but I for one don't know the cause. Possibly the house dips a little to one side."

"That can't be," said Burton, "because the folk up stairs are bothered with tipping pictures, too, only theirs lean to the north and west."

"Then I can't explain it," sighed the landlord, "but I do know that pictures are like a flock of sheep—when one tips all the rest are likely to follow."